

## **Elijah Lovejoy: Determined Patriot**

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Elijah Lovejoy was an advocate for civil rights, and he paid the highest penalty for standing up for what he believed was right. He was a beacon of free speech during the 1830s, and, for that, should be commended. His writings brought many people to question their political and moral views on free speech, freedom of the press, and slavery. Even though his time spent publishing his newspaper was short lived, he managed to create a significant role for himself in the annals of American history.

“The story of Lovejoy and the Abolitionists is the story of the enduring vigil for freedom of thought, speech, and the press,” according to one Web site. Elijah Lovejoy was a man who had strong moral fiber, which initially led him into serving as a Presbyterian minister. He began to speak his mind on the situation about the United States during the 1830s, and began to print a paper which would change his life. While he was publishing in St. Louis, a pro-slavery mob raided his building and destroyed his printing press. To escape further disruption, he moved across the Mississippi River to Alton, Illinois. During the 1830s he proclaimed that slavery should be abolished. This is something which would not have gotten him in trouble in a northern state, but in Missouri, slavery was legal. Lovejoy soon became outspoken on many aspects of civil rights, which caused conflict with outspoken citizens of the opposite viewpoint. Lovejoy made many enemies when he wrote that, “men and women who oppose slavery and yet did nothing to end it [were sinners]”. Those kinds of statements got Elijah into trouble.

Elijah Lovejoy made many enemies writing his anti-slavery articles in his

newspaper. His determination to express his opinion was astounding. He was harassed for his feelings and for his intentions to put intelligent thought into the public discussion. “He continued writing and publishing the *Alton Observer* even after three presses were destroyed and thrown into the Mississippi River,” according to one source.

On the night of November 7, 1837, Lovejoy and a small group of supporters were guarding his fourth printing press when an angry mob approached the building. A clash ensued and in the conflict Lovejoy was shot in the chest, killing him instantly. Elijah Lovejoy is remembered for his determination to state his views on slavery and civil rights. Elijah Lovejoy’s friend Edward Beecher described him well when he called Lovejoy, “the first martyr in America to the freedom of speech and press.”

In many people’s opinion, “Elijah Lovejoy became an instant martyr in his actions to defend human rights.” Nothing stopped him from holding up his ideas of what “free speech” meant. He supported both free speech and the idea that all men are created equal by publishing his paper. Lovejoy should be seen in the same rank as many patriots of the American Revolution. [From “Elijah Parish Lovejoy,” <[www.altonweb.com](http://www.altonweb.com)> (Oct. 15, 2006); Stu Fliege, *Tails and Trails of Illinois*; Abraham Resnick, *They Too Influenced a Nation’s History*; and James Satter, *Journalists Who Made History*.]